

COVID-19 Decision Trees for K-12 Schools

Frequently Asked Questions

Last Updated **April 10, 2023** (changes highlighted in yellow)

COMMON TERMS

1. What is the definition of a **close contact**?

The definition of close contact depends on the size of the indoor space, the distance between the case and the contact, and the arrangement within the indoor environment. Specifically, a close contact is defined as follows:

- In indoor spaces 400,000 or fewer cubic feet per floor (such as home, clinic waiting room, airplane etc.), a close contact is defined as sharing the same indoor airspace for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period (for example, three individual 5-minute exposures for a total of 15 minutes) during an infected person's (confirmed by COVID-19 test or [clinical diagnosis](#)) infectious period.
- In large indoor spaces greater than 400,000 cubic feet per floor (such as open-floor-plan offices, warehouses, large retail stores, manufacturing, or food processing facilities), a close contact is defined as being within 6 feet of the infected person for a cumulative total of 15 minutes or more over a 24-hour period during the infected person's infectious period.

Spaces that are separated by floor-to-ceiling walls (e.g., offices, suites, rooms, waiting areas, bathrooms, or break or eating areas that are separated by floor-to-ceiling walls) must be considered distinct indoor airspaces.

2. What is the definition of the infectious state?

For individuals who test positive and had COVID-19 symptoms, from two days before the date of symptom onset until:

- Five to 10 days have passed after symptoms first appeared; and
- Twenty-four hours have passed with no fever, without the use of fever-reducing medications, and symptoms have improved.

Starting any time after Day 5, the infectious period has ended if the COVID-19 case has no fever for 24 hours and symptoms have improved, with no testing necessary.

After Day 10, the infectious period has ended if the COVID-19 case has no fever for 24 hours, whether or not other symptoms are improving, with no testing necessary.

For individuals who test positive and never develop COVID-19 symptom, from two days before the positive specimen collection date through day 5 after the date on which the specimen for their first positive test for COVID-19 was collected. If the individual develops symptoms the clock resets, and day 0 is the date of the symptom onset.

CONTACT TRACING AND CLOSE CONTACTS

3. Is identifying **close contacts in outdoor settings** still required?

No. The definition of close contact is focused solely on indoor exposures.

EMPLOYEES: Per Cal/OSHA, employers must respond to COVID-19 cases that were present in the workplace during their infectious state, which includes contact tracing of employees. The employer shall notify employees and independent contractors who had a close contact in the workplace as defined above, as well as any employer with an employee who had a close contact. Notice shall be provided as soon as possible. The employer must also provide notification of the COVID-19 case to all employees who were potentially exposed.

STUDENTS: It is no longer required or recommended that notification is provided to students who were potentially exposed. Outbreaks of three individuals or more who test positive within a 14-day period and who are thought to be epidemiologically linked and are present in the school setting should be reported to County Public Health. The reporting requirements include information on the student and/or employee close contacts. Therefore, contact tracing of students will be needed in the case of an outbreak.

4. Can a COVID-positive household member isolate themselves in a room in their home?

If the COVID-positive person is not able to isolate in a separate residence, the county's [home isolation instructions](#) ([translations](#)) describe the specific requirements for isolation in a home occupied by others.

5. Can a person attend school/work if they live with a person who is COVID-positive?

A person who lives with a household member who is COVID-positive may continue to attend school/work if they do not have symptoms. The person should **consider testing** immediately upon learning that they are a close contact, and **should test again** on Day 3, 4, or 5, after the COVID-positive household member completes their isolation.

- Student and employee close contacts should be strongly encouraged to wear a mask indoors and around others through Day 10.
- The person should isolate immediately if they develop symptoms or test positive.
- Parents and employees are expected to report positive test results to the school.
- The positive household member should isolate themselves as described in question **45**.

6. Is quarantine optional?

The CDPH no longer requires quarantine for asymptomatic close contacts. People who have been identified as close contacts may remain at school or work unless they develop symptoms, and **should** test on Day 3, 4, or 5 following their last exposure to a person who was contagious with COVID-19.

- Student and employee close contacts should be strongly encouraged to wear a mask indoors and around others through Day 10.
- For students, parents are expected to report positive test results to the school.
- ~~Employers must require evidence of a verified negative test result or exclude the employee through the end of Day 10.~~ Employees are expected to report positive test results to their employer.
- In an outbreak setting, employees who are identified as close contacts **must** test on day 3, 4, or 5 following their last exposure or be excluded from work through the end of Day 10.
- If a student or an employee develops one or more symptoms associated with COVID-19, they must isolate immediately and contact their school/employer.

7. Are people who are at least 14 days past completion of their primary COVID-19 vaccination series exempt from the requirement that they test on Day 3, 4, or 5?

No. Per the CDPH guidance people who are identified as a close contact of a person who was contagious with COVID-19 are recommended to test on Day 3, 4, or 5. In an outbreak, **per Cal OSHA**, employees who are identified as close contacts are required to test on Day 3-5 or be excluded from work. This includes people who are fully vaccinated. However, those who have recovered from a prior lab-confirmed infection within the last 30 days should not test as long as they remain asymptomatic (see question **811**).

8. Are people who are within 30 days of a prior lab-confirmed infection exempt from the requirement that they test on Day 3, 4, or 5?

Yes. Per the CDPH guidance, people who do not have symptoms and have recovered from a prior verified infection within the last 30 days do not need to test on Day 3, 4, or 5 following an exposure. The CDPH guidance was updated to reduce the exemption from testing requirement from individuals within 90 days of a prior lab-confirmed infection to individuals within 30 days of a prior lab-confirmed infection. If symptoms develop, the person should take an antigen test immediately and follow the instructions on the Symptom and Isolation Tree.

9. Are schools required to see evidence of negative test results from students who are required to test as part of an exposed group?

No. Schools are not required to track test results. Parents are expected to inform the school when their child tests positive or develops symptoms.

9. Are schools required to see evidence of negative test results from individuals who are returning from isolation after developing symptoms or a positive test result?

No. Schools are not required to track test results. Individuals with symptoms should test immediately following symptom onset. Parents and employees are expected to inform the school of a positive test result. Individuals returning from isolation on Day 6 due to a positive test result, are no longer required to provide evidence of a negative test on Day 5 or later.

ISOLATION

10. Are individuals who are returning from isolation on Day 6 after a positive test result required to wear a mask?

STUDENTS: Students who are returning from isolation on Day 6 or later after a positive test result should wear a mask through Day 10. A student may remove their mask if they have two sequential negative tests one day apart.

EMPLOYEES: Per Cal/OSHA, employees who are returning from isolation on Day 6 or later after a positive test result must wear a mask through Day 10.

10. Can students who return from isolation before Day 11 participate in before and after school programs and activities on Days 6 through 10?

Children who are permitted to return to school from isolation before Day 11 may participate in before and after school expanded learning programs and childcare, however they should be strongly encouraged to wear a mask that fits snugly over their nose and mouth indoors.

11. Can student athletes who return from isolation before Day 11 practice and compete on Days 6 through 10 if they commit to wearing a mask?

It is not prohibited, but it's also not advisable. A negative test result on Day 5 after symptom onset does not mean there is no virus in the person. It means that their viral load is low enough to reduce the chances of transmission while they are wearing a well-fitted mask. During exercise people exhale heavily, making their mask less effective, and increasing the chance of transmission. Limiting students who have returned from isolation to "walk-through" activities is advisable on Days 6 through 10.

12. Can musicians who return from isolation before Day 11 practice or perform on Days 6 through 10 if they use a bell cover over their instrument?

Students who return from isolation before Day 11 should be strongly encouraged to wear a mask that fits snugly over their nose and mouth indoors. A bell cover for the instrument is also strongly encouraged during days 6-10.

TESTING

11. When is confirmation of an antigen test result necessary?

Positive antigen test results, including positive at-home test results, do not require confirmation with a PCR or other NAAT.

- The decision tree for Asymptomatic Positive individuals has been updated, removing PCR confirmation as a means of verifying a positive antigen test result from a person who does not have symptoms.

12. Can at-home testing be used to satisfy testing requirements?

STUDENTS: Schools may accept the results of at-home testing for the same uses for which antigen tests are approved. Schools are encouraged to use a means described in the [Over-The-Counter Tests Guidance](#) to verify the results on tests administered at home. See the "What are best practices for verification of self-test results?" section for specific recommendations.

EMPLOYEES: ~~Effective September 17, 2022, routine weekly testing for unvaccinated K-12 workers is no longer required.~~ If testing is necessary, per Cal/OSHA, "an over-the-counter (OTC) COVID-19 test may be both self-administered and self-read if verification of the results, such as a time and date stamped photograph of the result or an OTC test that uses digital reporting with time and date stamped results, is provided."

STUDENTS and EMPLOYEES: If an individual has symptoms, schools should send them home with two at-home self-tests and give the following instructions for follow-up testing at home: "If test is NEGATIVE today test again in 24 hours. If that test is negative but you are still experiencing symptoms, wait another 24-48 hours and take another test."

Individuals should take a test as soon as possible after onset of symptoms. If the first test is negative, test again in 24 hours. If that test is negative but still experiencing symptoms, wait another 24-48 hours and take another test.

13. What are the requirements if a person tests positive but has no symptoms?

If the person remains asymptomatic, they are required to self-isolate for 5 days from the date on which the positive test was collected. To return to school, students **should** wear a mask that fits snugly over their nose and mouth, indoors and within 6 feet of others outside, on Days 6 through 10. ~~After ending isolation, students may remove their mask sooner than Day 10 with two sequential negative tests. Per Cal/OSHA, employees **must should** mask through Day 10 when returning from isolation. After ending isolation, employees may remove their mask sooner than Day 10 with two sequential negative tests one day apart.~~

~~If the person develops symptoms, the isolation clock resets to the symptom onset date. must be extended until 10 days have passed since the onset of symptoms.~~

VACCINATION STATUS

14. Has the standard for being fully vaccinated changed?

The term "fully vaccinated" has not been redefined. It still refers to a person who is 14 days past completion of the primary vaccination series that is recommended by the vaccine manufacturer.

15. Do K-12 workers who are unvaccinated need to continue testing weekly?

No. Effective Sept. 17, 2022 unvaccinated K-12 workers no longer need to undergo weekly testing as previously mandated by the Aug. 2021 public health order.

15. Will CDPH be requiring COVID-19 vaccinations for students and staff in the future?

According to CDPH, the agency is not currently exploring emergency rulemaking to add COVID-19 vaccinations to the list of required school vaccinations but continue to strongly recommend COVID-19 immunizations for students and staff to keep everyone safer in the classroom. Any changes to required K-12 immunizations are properly addressed through the legislative process.

RECORDKEEPING

16. What are employers required to track relating to COVID-19?

Per Cal/OSHA all employee positive COVID-19 cases (who were on campus during their infectious period) must be recorded and tracked. All employee COVID-19 cases must be tracked and recorded with the employee's name, contact information, occupation, location where the employee worked, date of last day at the workplace and date of positive COVID-19 test. The information must be provided immediately, if requested, by any of the following organizations: local health department, Cal/OSHA, the CDPH, and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

REQUIREMENTS VERSUS RECOMMENDATIONS

17. Why are some of the CDC's recommendations not included in the decision trees?

While the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) makes recommendations, the requirements for California schools are established by the CDPH and the school's local health jurisdiction. The decision tree is based on the [CDPH K-12 guidance](#) and [related FAQ, K-12 Testing Strategies, COVID-19 Prevention Non-Emergency Regulations](#), the local [public health orders](#), pertinent executive orders, and answers received directly from the CDPH.